

[Brook Campbell]

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Range-lore

Elizabeth Doyle

San Angelo, Texas.

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RANGE-LORE

[Brook Campbell?] came from Independence, Missouri, to Tom Green County when a lad of twelve. Throughout his ranching experience he worked all over West Texas before he settled at Mertzon, Irion County, Texas. Mr. Campbell's story follows:

"I used to come to San Angelo with my father when we had to camp in the wagon yard where the Woolworth building now stands.

"One Sunday morning we had been in for a few days and Tom Ketchum was hangin' 'round the yard. He was on the dodge then and was trying to get to his brother somewhere in another part of the state. C12 - 2/11/41 - Texas 2 He kept his horse in the wagon yard and seemed to take a likin' to me. On Sunday morning he asked me to take his horse out and exercise him. I imagined that his horse would be as wild as I thought he must be but he was gentle and I sure enjoyed riding him. When I had ridden awhile I took him down to the Legal Tender Saloon, where Tom was gambling. I went in and told him his horse was out there. He went out and petted him awhile and said, 'Come on kid, let's see how many "splitters" (nickels and dimes) we can find.' We went on up stairs and he raked off a handful and gave to me. I was tickled to death, for mother made me go to Sunday School every Sunday when I was where I could, so I had more money for the Sunday School that

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morning than I had ever had before. After I got out of Sunday School I rushed back to the wagon yard hoping to get to ride the horse again and earn some more "splitters". When I got there his horse was in the yard alright but Tom was pacing around very restlessly. He looked at me and said, 'Kid, I think I'll exercise "Streak" this evening.' He was soon off and I never saw him again. I suffered a lot of boyish grief over that but not like when Mr. Charley left.

"A kid would naturally have many unusual experiences around a wagon yard in those days so I was always having my share.

"Charley Pierce was an outlaw trying to turn straight. He had belonged to a gang somewhere in the north and had 3 come to West Texas to start a new life. He joined up with the 4 Cross L's a few miles west of San Angelo. I happened to be out there that day so he sent a telegram into San Angelo by me explaining to his boss that he was going in for cowboy life. His hands were soft and white and his boots glistened. Adapting himself to the rough ways of earning a living as a cowboy was not easy for him. He tried it earnestly for several weeks and I can see now that he put up a pretty good fight. He had taken a great fancy to me after I took his message into town and like any boy I enjoyed being noticed and stuck around him a lot, especially in the wagon yard. One day I thought he seemed unusually quiet and sort of blue like, so after a while he looked up at me from where he sat marking on the ground and said, 'Kid, I'm going away from here.' 'Where to, Mr. Charley, won't I get to see you again?' 'Back to the old gang, son,' he said, 'where I can lick my finger and pull cards and get the money one way or another, a little faster than we got it here. Here are my spurs, keep them and I will come back to see you sometimes.' I cried myself to sleep that night. To a young boy, kindness and attention mean more than anything else in all the world and I could not think of Mr. Charley as being bad in any way. He was my hero and my boy heart was crushed but not as it was several weeks later. Rome Shields was sheriff here then, so one day he brought a picture to my father and asked him if he 4 knew it. 'Yes,' said father, 'and Brook is down at the wagon yard, let's go down and see if he knows him.' I shall never forget my feelings as I looked upon the bullet-

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ridden likeness of my friend. His shirt had been thrown back and the bullet holes were plainly visible over his chest. 'Know this fellow, Brook?' questioned the sheriff. My knees seemed to be crumpling under me and my throat felt dry as I answered, 'Yes, that's Mr. Charley.' The report was that he was captured in a dugout and shot on sight. It took me a long time to get over that and I still have the spurs.

"My first real ranch work was on the Billy Holmsley Ranch. Our brand was an A on either side and we were located some thirty-five miles west of Angelo. Everything was pretty wild and woolly, even then, and that hasn't been so long ago as some of the ranching days of this area.

"We drove a herd into San Angelo one day and were to see Booger Red's Wild West Show. It was plenty wild alright, one white man and two Mexicans were killed. We were all out around the show and several of the boys were sitting on the fence. A fellow walked up to me and said, 'Brook, gimme some tobaccer.' I handed him the tobacco and just as he put it into his mouth an enemy shot him down. The brawl was on. Men, women, and children shouted and screamed and ran pell-mell over each other. When the law arrived and cleared things out a bit 5 one white man and two Mexicans lay sprawled upon the ground.

"The white man ran a saloon in San Angelo and the shooting was the result of an old feud. Just how or why the Mexicans were killed was never known but it was supposed to have been by stray bullets. This all slowed up the show for a few minutes until the bodies were removed, but Booger Red rode his bad horses, furnished his usual entertainment and the show went on. I don't think I ever saw an uglier man but one of the most jovial fellows and the best rider I ever saw. He could ride any way he hit, backwards or forwards.

"After the show we went back to the stock pens where our wagon was, got a bunch of cattle we had traded for and went home.

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"The next year I made a change to the Barr Ranch and remember so well an old boy we called "Cedar Handle." He had made some kind of a mess putting in a cedar pole for an axe handle and had acquired that name. I believe he had less nerve than any man I ever knew. He was afraid of his shadow. We had all made our beds down one night and polecats had been the subject of discussion before retiring. One of the mischievous fellows had caught a little rabbit so he slipped it in old Cedar Handle's bed. Well when he crawled in and felt that rabbit he went wild. He wouldn't have shrieked or cut up any worse if a bed of rattlesnakes had piled in with him. Cover flew in every 6 direction and old Cedar Handle's eyes looked like saucers. When he threw his bedding to the winds the little rabbit of course ran off. The old boy never knew but what there was a polecat in his bed. We could hardly persuade him to go back to bed that night and when he did he lighted a lantern and kept it right by him the balance of the night.

"Our outfit went to Sherwood for supplies and once when three of us had gone in, one of the boys sent for socks. On our way back we pulled off our dirty socks right there on the stage coach, put them in the bundle and each of us put on a pair of his clean socks. We could hardly keep our faces straight when we handed him the bundle. I guess he was like the rest of us, needed the socks pretty badly so he sat right down to get into a pair of them. When he pulled out those old dirty socks of ours I believe I could have lit a match on his face and the more we laughed the madder he got. It went on so far that one of the boys agreed to go back to town and get him some socks when the next stage ran, which was next day. We made up the change and got him all fixed up next day but he never did like for us to joke him about the socks.

"My main job around camps was to break wild horses, and I feel sure that is why I am in this invalid's chair today, even though many have done the same thing and are still going. I rode one old outlaw horse once and instead 7 of hearing the usual sound of my neck a-poppin', it was my back and I'm sure some part of my spine was injured in a way that doctors have not been able to aid, so far, and I have been to some of the best. Ridin' this

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chair is the hardest ridin' I've ever done and I was considered good. My friends ask me how I keep so cheerful, and comment on my perpetual smile. I always tell them that I've got to play the game through, with my chin up. I wouldn't be a first class cowboy if I gave up now, for a real cowboy always has grit.

"We had lots of funny nicknames in the old outfits. For the smallest reasons sometimes a fellow would acquire the most ridiculous name which would stick to him for life. "High Pockets," "Handsome Harry," and even more comical ones were always in order. Mine was always "Brownie" because of my brown eyes, hair, and skin.

"The cowboys carried guns sometimes but not as is reported on them today. I have carried a winchester on my saddle to kill deer more than any other kind of a gun and many other cowboys did the same. This is never shown in the spectacular gun play on our modern screen.

"My pet horse was named "Kid." He was the smartest horse I ever saw and could have been trained for a circus. I could put his bridle on him and he would follow the wagon a thousand miles. As far as he could hear me whistle he would nicker. Any of the other boys could make every attempt at imitating my whistle and he would pay no attention 8 what-so-ever. We all got a big kick out of that and I thought that was one of the cutest things he did. He was an all around cow horse, good anywhere we wanted to use him. He was as good as the old white horse named "Chicken," was mean. I rode "Chicken" three years and didn't even tame him, much less gentle him. It was a fight every time I got on him and I had to ride him down every morning before he was worth a darn.

"I was just talking last night about a bunch of us gathering up a lot of old poor bulls down on Suggs Ranch. The boss wanted to go off somewhere and left a boy in charge. He kept trying to turn an old bull and couldn't do anything with him. I loped out to try to help him and about that time he threw his rope around the old bull's hips. It slipped off and hung on his tail. Just then I caught him by the head and hollered at the boy that if my rope broke

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he would certainly have the bull by the tail. My rope did break and away the old bull went again. The rope must have been very tightly looped around that old devil's tail for he made a leap at the boy's horse and knocked him down. The other end of the rope was tied to the saddle horn and when the horse fell the girth broke and the boy jumped off. The loop was still holding, so that let the old bull loose with the saddle tied to his tail. Three of us boys were after him by this time and across the creek we went. Just as 9 we crossed, one of the boys made a grab at the saddle, wrapped it around a tree and that jerked the old bull's tail off. That fellow was known as the Bob Tail Bull forever afterwards.

"Stampedes were hardly ever funny, but in this instance I had a lot of fun. We had run 1,600 head of cattle all day trying to water them. That night the moon was shining brightly and the old thirsty cattle would not bed down. They would just walk and bawl, walk and bawl. The guards couldn't do anything with them so I made up my mind all to myself what I'd do. I said, 'Jake, them cattle aint a-goin' to quiet down. You get on that point and I'll get on this one.' When I got over on my point I was far enough away from the others to get down on my hands and knees, run into them and jump up suddenly, popping my leggin's together. That was enough, we ran them all night long and didn't get them corralled until about noon next day; our boiled beef and beans tasted good too, when we got to it again. The cook would yell, 'Chuck,' and shake the tin dishes in the old wooden box and we would stampede. If we had a new comer in the crowd, we would always stand back 'til he got hold of the coffee pot, then holler, 'Sucker at the pot.' The poor old guy would have to pour until he gave out.

"On one occasion I drove 5,000 sheep to the 101 Ranch in Oklahoma. I stopped them in a field near a little Indian school house awhile before I reached the 101 Ranch. The teacher and a few little Indian kids came 10 out, viewed the mass of sheep in great wonder, and the teacher asked me how many there were. I told her to guess. She started off by buessing 500 and on up to 2,500. When I told her there were more than 5,000 she couldn't believe me. Pictures were made several times along the route and on one occasion a scene was shot for the movies. Later the picture came to San Angelo and one of my

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neighbors said, 'Brook, I saw you at the show the other night.' 'Nope, not me,' I says, 'for I havn't been to town in a month.' Then he told me about the pictures and I was sorry I missed it but even in the days of the first movies, communication and newspaper service was not so good as it is now and I didn't know the picture was coming.

“On this 101 Ranch in Oklahoma were thousands of buffaloes. The night before I was to get there I was camped with my sheep and over a hundred buffaloes came by my camp. Men soon came looking for them and as they can not be driven they had a time getting them back. They just had to sort of work them in a certain direction and finally got them back.

“One fall, when Ford cars first came into use, six Mexicans and I took 1,100 head of mustang horses to Mexico. Gathering and selling these wild creatures had become a right profitable business with me. One of the Mexicans and I would lead the way in our Ford while the other five rode horses and drove them. As we went out of San Angelo we were stretched out down Chadbourne Street 11 about a half a mile. All traffic was stopped, several pictures were made and the local paper gave us a big write-up. Several pictures were made along the route, especially in El Paso and always we were promised a picture. To this day I don't have one picture of those horses except the dim snap shot I cut from the newspaper.

“I have plenty of time now to live over my cowboy days in vivid memories but with so many good friends trying to help me lighten the way, with correspondence, scrapbooks, post cards, and other various acts of kindness, I manage to get more happiness out of life than folks would imagine.”